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Pat McCrory
Governor

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John E. Skvarla, III
Secretary, DENR

GORGES DEDICATES NEW VISITOR CENTER

A dramatic new visitor center, picnic shelters and related amenities have opened up North Carolina's westernmost state park to a wider audience. Formal dedication of the facilities Oct. 12 marked completion of the first phase of development at Gorges State Park in Transylvania County.

Similar to visitor centers built at 21 state parks and state recreation areas since 1994, the 7,100-square-foot facility at Gorges offers a unique design fitted to the park's mountain setting, and features museum-quality exhibits, a teaching auditorium and classroom along with administrative offices. Two day-use picnic areas with shelters were built nearby, and three separate parking areas offer space for 160 vehicles.

The project represents



WOODWORK AND STONE ARE USED IN THE EXTERIOR OF THE VISITOR CENTER BUILT TO NATIONAL "GREEN BUILDING" STANDARDS.

an investment of \$6.4 million from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the principal funding source for state park capital

projects and land acquisition.

The dedication coincided with a quarterly meeting

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JOHN SKVARLA HEADS DENR

John E. Skvarla, III will head the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the parent agency of the state parks system, under the administration of Gov. Pat McCrory.

In early January, Skvarla named a leadership team for the department.

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MST ROUTE ADVANCES

Volunteers from three organizations are working with the state parks system to forge the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail through the rolling hills of the northern piedmont.

They celebrated their successes in October with a vat of hot chicken stew, music, pep talks and formal designation of the trail's route along the 12 miles of footpaths in Pilot

Mountain State Park.

"With this announcement, we are that much closer to having a hiking trail that will connect and showcase the beauty of three unique state parks that on a clear day are within sight of each other," said Kate Dixon, executive director of the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

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NEW FACILITIES, LAND PROJECTS OK'D

The N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority in October allocated \$11.7 million from the fund for several capital improvement projects, maintenance across the state parks system and key land acquisitions.

Facility development

funding approved by the board includes design and/or development funding for a new visitor center at Lake Norman State Park; tent and boat camping at Lake James State Park; youth cabin renovations and interim development at a recent land addition at Haw River State

Park; bathhouse repairs and renovations at Fort Macon State Park; water system improvements at Pilot Mountain State Park and a tree canopy walk at William B. Umstead State Park.

The authority also approved funding for modest land acquisitions at Chimney Rock, Cliffs of the Neuse, Dismal Swamp, Hanging Rock, New River, Pettigrew, Pilot Mountain and Stone Mountain state parks, as well as Bear Paw State Natural Area and Deep River State Trail.

Maintenance funds authorized by the board will be used for trail and exhibit rehabilitation, along with repairs and demolition of other park facilities.

The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund is the principal funding source for state park capital projects and land acquisition. The authority approved the projects during a quarterly meeting at Gorges State Park.

Lewis Ledford, director of the Division of Parks and Recreation, provided the authority with a year-end review and briefed members on current issues and expectations for the coming year. Carl Silverstein, executive director of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, presented a summary of the organization's accomplishments and ongoing preservation efforts.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Gorges State Park Superintendent Steve Pagano presented an overview of the park, which was established in 1999.

From The Director's Desk

Thanks to all our state parks staff, the second First Day Hikes event was a success. Despite dreary weather, more than 400 hikers covered 1,135 miles on our trails. Having a First Day Hike in every one of our parks and recreation areas broadened its appeal and demonstrated our commitment to this new holiday tradition.

It was a great start to a new year and the promise of more successes in 2013. For more inspiration, we and our partners can take pride in some accomplishments during the year just ended. Speaking of partners, several new park friends groups were established with the guidance and encouragement of the state-wide Friends of State Parks. Their enthusiasm is contagious, and this network of support is vital to the success of our mission. The Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail was also instrumental in an additional 35 miles of footpath being formally designated to this state park unit.

Improvements at the state parks continued during the year. We dedicated a stunning new visitor center at Gorges State Park that will establish the park's identity and provide an environmental education resource. Chimney Rock State Park dedicated significant improvements to its access and elevator systems, and a project at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area added boat ramps, courtesy docks and tournament facilities that can aid the area's tourism economy. At Morrow Mountain State Park we completed a new recreational boathouse replacing a 60-year-old structure. At Fort Macon State Park, with the help of community college students, we mounted three new replica cannon just in time for a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Battle for Fort Macon. The reenactment was one of the largest events in the history of our state parks. All of this was accomplished while managing a third year of record attendance of more than 14 million visitors.

Here's hoping that all of us benefit from this encouragement and inspiration to greet a new year.

Sincerely,



FIRST DAY HIKES



HIKERS AT HANGING ROCK STATE PARK, RIGHT, TACKLED THE 'FIVE OVERLOOKS CHALLENGE.' THE OLDEST HIKER WAS JACK BANE, 85, ABOVE, WHO CAME TO MORROW MOUNTAIN STATE PARK.



HIKERS COVER 1,135 MILES IN JAN. 1 EVENT

Despite a chilly drizzle throughout North Carolina and some ice-glazed roads in the mountains, 417 people celebrated a new year Jan. 1 with First Day Hikes in the state parks.

A New Year's Day hike was scheduled in every state park and state recreation area as part of an event that's becoming an annual tradition of rejuvenation and good health.

Altogether, there were 44 hikes arranged by rangers, covering 1,135 miles in North Carolina. This is the second year for the First Day Hikes event, sponsored in conjunction with America's State Parks and the National Association of State Park Directors.

Nationally, more than 20,000 people were counted on 650 hikes during the day.

"Exploring the year-round splendor of nature is quickly becoming a New Year's Day tradition," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "The ranger-guided hikes are an excellent way to keep fit during the holidays, connect with nature and develop a deeper appreciation for our rich natural resources."

Rangers worked to provide variety in the hikes. The most ambitious was at Hanging Rock State Park, where nine visitors took on the "Five Overlooks Challenge," a 10-mile excursion across the park's highest peaks. The hike launched a new tradition at that park: any visitor who completes the challenge in a single day is eligible to purchase an embroidered patch for bragging purposes.

At Weymouth Woods Historic Nature Preserve, 20 hikers trekked to see the world's oldest longleaf pine, while at Grandfather Mountain State Park, hikers braved a steep, snow-covered trail for a "sensory hike" which taught them how to use all their senses in the outdoors.

The oldest hiker of the day was 85-year-old Jack Bane, who came to Morrow Mountain State Park for a brief morning walk and was inspired to stay for an afternoon tour as well.

And, in a class by itself was the event at Eno River State Park, where 147 people extended a New Year's Day tradition begun more than 40 years ago by the Eno River Association. Long- and short-version hikes were led by volunteers and followed by hot chocolate and fellowship.



GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN HIKERS ENDURED SNOW.

WACCAMAW WHALE GETS RESTING PLACE

A prehistoric whale that once prowled ocean waters covering eastern North Carolina was gently consigned to its final resting place in August in a glass case at Lake Waccamaw State Park.

Scientists, rangers and neighbors of the park celebrated a gleaming new exhibit in Lake Waccamaw's visitor center that showcases the extremely rare, fossilized skull of the creature, four years after it was pried from the limestone lakebed.

It is the most complete fossil in the world of a Balaenula whale that lived about 2.75 million years ago when much of the coastal area was under water. A member of the baleen family – a class of whales that includes today's humpback and right whale species – the animal grew to about 20 feet long.

The story of the fossil's discovery is nearly as unique as the fossil itself. Cathy Neilson, a neighbor and member of the park's friends group, literally stumbled on the thing as she and friends were snorkeling a few yards offshore from her home.

Thinking it might be important, she called then-superintendent Chris Helms who, in turn, contacted researchers, including Vince Schneider, a paleontologist from the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences.

Schneider and members of the state's Underwater Archaeology Branch retrieved several pieces of limestone encasing the whale's remains from waist-deep water, the largest be-



Whale skull is enclosed in a glass exhibit case. ing about the size of an engine block.

Over the following months, Schneider enlisted the help of Alton Dooley of the Virginia Museum of Natural History in cleaning and reassembling the fragments of skull and jawbones. Dooley, who described the find as "scientifically very significant," said it is one of only five such fossils found in the world and the only one in North America. He said scientists will continue to study it for years to come.

From the day of the find, Neilson, Helms and current superintendent Toby Hall envisioned the reassembled skull skillfully displayed at the park's visitor center. Lake Waccamaw has a mysterious history as one of North Carolina's bay lakes and a laundry list of curious creatures past and present.

They reasoned the skull could become the natural crowning touch of the exhibit hall's natural history exhibits.

Schneider said that such discoveries as the Balaenula are often automatically absorbed into the museum's collections in Raleigh, but that the state park and its friends were tenacious.

"They really lobbied," he said. "They eventually showed me that the people here really care for this specimen and that it should be here."



Researchers recovered the skull fragments, which were encased in limestone, during 2008.

FISHING HOOKS 'EM AT LUMBER RIVER

Rangers at Lumber River State Park are hooking 'em, two or three at a time.

For bait, they're using the bass and redbreast sunfish in the dark, tea-colored water of the national Wild and Scenic River. The whole experience of floating and fishing the Lumber River hooks park visitors on the natural resource and continued, deep-seated support of the state park.

"Awesome," said Noah Allen, a teen of few words, after his day on the river. Noah and his father Jason, who moved to within a few miles of the Lumber River, had never spent much time on it or in it.

They had floated the river with a ranger earlier in the week for just a couple hours, had returned for the guiding fishing trip program and already were making plans to attend other park programs – and thinking of buying a used canoe.

Rangers Ronald Anderson and Brantley Bowen decided a couple years ago to occasionally add a fishing element to the canoe and kayak trips they guide from several points along the winding river.

Starting with borrowed rods and a few lures they bought themselves, they've probably introduced 75-100 people to fishing, Bowen said, mostly in groups of three or four, although hosting an occasional group of youngsters will keep them busy for hours retrieving lures from the tree-tops and untangling line.

Recently, a park advisory committee member donated some new rods, which has helped the cause.



NOAH ALLEN, LEFT, AND HIS FATHER JASON WARM UP WITH UNFAMILIAR FISHING GEAR BEFORE A THREE HOUR TRIP DOWN THE LUMBER RIVER.

The rangers are convinced that snagging a fish from the Lumber River gives visitors an intimate connection with the resource that few other experiences do. The biggest haul to date was 74 fish caught on a perfect June morning with a very small group, Bowen said.

Most trips of 3-4 hours result in just a handful of smallish fish, but the visitors are hooked deeper than their prey. It's a much more challenging and physical experience than a simple canoe float, with limbs,

snags and swift current adding drama to every cast, and that leads visitors to total immersion in the task at hand. It's a level of concentration that's hard to achieve in a park program.

In slack water or the occasional stop on a sandbar, a ranger will slip in a few words about the protection of the natural resource, the park's history and conservation in general. Spotting a cottonmouth water moccasin or unusual plant opens the subject.



THE EXPERIENCE MIXES FISHING WITH LESSONS ON THE RIVER RESOURCE.

‘FINE KETTLE OF HAWKS’ AT PILOT MTN.

Unfortunately, none of the people watching for hawks from the lofty reaches of Pilot Mountain State Park have eyesight as good as their quarry.

So, it requires hours of intense peering through high-powered binoculars at miniscule dots on a hazy horizon, and trying to determine the shape of a wing or a telltale soaring pattern. But on occasion, the rewards can be spectacular for a dedicated birder when dozens of broadwing hawks suddenly appear on the flyway east of the Blue Ridge.

“They just find those thermals and gain height and just glide away, and it’s a very efficient way of migrating thousands of miles,” said Phil Dickinson of Forsyth Audubon.

The annual hawk watch at the state park is essentially a two-week interpretive program. Audubon volunteers try to man the Pinnacle overlook daily for the last two weeks of September. They usually post a “tally board” showing the number and species of hawks sighted.

Naturally curious visitors are given a natural history lesson about the raptors that migrate from northeastern states to Central and South America. The event doubles as a recruitment tool for Audubon when visitors become interested enough to consider birding as a hobby, Dickinson said.

The most frequent visitor question, he said, is whether any eagles are spotted. The answer: one eagle every day or so.

More frequently, the watchers see vultures and ravens which often nest on the mountain as well as red-tailed or red-shouldered hawks, fairly



MEMBERS OF FORSYTH AUDUBON WATCH FOR HAWKS FROM THE PINNACLE OVERLOOK FOR ABOUT TWO WEEKS DURING THE MIGRATION, common raptors in North Carolina that do not migrate.

The broadwings are the prize, and they’re tracked from a series of watching stations north to south along both sides of the Blue Ridge, with results sent to the Hawk Migration Association of North America database.

The hawk watch experience resembles nothing so much as being in the crow’s nest of a ship at sea, since Pilot Mountain overlooks miles of rolling countryside of the northern piedmont in all directions. The observation point is a somewhat confined space that presents a broad panorama of horizon to scan.

Dickinson said the best viewing times are usually from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The hawks’ schedule depends much on the timing of thermal currents that develop when warm air collides

with the mountainsides. Hours can go by with only local birds to keep company, and suddenly a large group of hawks – formally known as a kettle – will appear seemingly out of nowhere.

In a normal year, the group tallies 3-4,000 hawks, and in one legendary sighting a few years ago, 1,500 hawks were counted in a half hour.

Vera Cruz, Mexico is a choke point for the migration, Dickinson said, and hundreds of thousands of the birds can be seen in a day.

Audubon members began counting the hawks in the mid-1970s under the prodding of Ramona Snavelly, a sparkplug member of the chapter. A lack of volunteers slowed the tradition for a time, Dickinson said.

When Snavelly died in 2006, the group made a new commitment to the task in her honor.

TAGGING THE MONARCH ‘SUPERHIGHWAY’

For several years, Brian Bockhahn has been cruising what he calls the “nectar superhighway” and checking for tags. This year, he pulled over 244 erratic drivers.

Bockhahn, a former ranger and now district education specialist for state parks, helps in a national monarch butterfly tagging program in early fall, when monarchs set out for winter homes in Mexico.

Each year, he invites park visitors along on some days to help with the research. This year, 19 people including one girl scout troop, tagged along with nets in hand.

Once butterflies are captured, tiny stickers are placed on their wings. On his busiest day this year, Bockhahn tagged 109 monarchs.

The butterflies, searching for natural areas to gather nectar on their journey, often pass through state parks, especially Kerr Lake and Falls Lake state recreation areas and Eno River State Park in the northern piedmont.

And, Bockhahn has had some limited success further west in Pilot Mountain and Hanging Rock state parks.

“What I term the ‘nectar superhighway’ of rail lines and power lines along and north of Interstate 85 were again the hotbed of activity,” Bockhahn said. “Several miles north or south of this location, even with the same exact nectar sources and at peak times, I had almost no luck finding monarchs.”

Monarchs gather nectar from whatever sources are in bloom along the route, he said, but their favorites seem to be tickseed sunflower, goldenrod, eastern baccharis and aster. One or two dozen butterflies will sometimes descend on



MONARCHS FIND NECTARING SPOTS IN MIGRATION.



TINY TAGS ARE MOUNTED ON BUTTERFLY WINGS. a shrub and can be plucked by hand for tagging.

Other times can be quite frustrating, he said. “At the Pilot Mountain hawk watch, I sat in vain as hundreds of monarchs flew overhead without stopping. I tempted them with some flower cuttings to no avail. Next year, I would like to try a few potted flowers and maybe I’ll dangle some plastic monarchs on them to see if that helps bring them down.”

Bockhahn occasionally recaptures monarchs he has himself tagged, and websites allow him to compare notes with other taggers. One butterfly tagged in Granville County was observed a few days later in a Greensboro backyard, traveling about 20 miles a day.



TRACK TRAIL

STONE MOUNTAIN STATE PARK DEDICATED A KID’S TRACK TRAIL THIS FALL NEAR THE HUTCHISON HOMESTEAD. THE TRACK TRAIL PROGRAM ENCOURAGES KIDS TO EXPLORE OUTDOORS.

GORGES VISITOR CENTER

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of the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority. Authority Chairman Bill Ross Jr., said, "This is a place where the community came together to build something special. You've come together to build and support a world class state park."

Indeed, the park staff regularly relied on help from the community when Superintendent Steve Pagano set up shop in a tiny interim office just outside the park boundary in 2000. The state park had just been created from a land deal between the state and Duke Energy Inc.

Gorges opened to the public in 2001 with interim facilities that primarily included picnic grounds, a gravel parking lot and rough trails. An ambitious master plan finished in 2003 calls for "perimeter development" to protect highly sensitive natural areas in the 7,500-acre park's interior.

The park claims 14 named waterfalls and at least 46 species of rare plants and animals. The next development phase will include camping along a loop road that leads from the visitor center.

Wayne McDevitt, who was secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources when the park was proposed, attended the dedication. He told the crowd that Gorges is a symbol of the state's commitment to natural resources.

"Every day, I remind myself of the trust we've been given, a natural trust," he said. "It's a natural trust we should always protect. It's that trust that makes it possible for us to give our children clean water



STATE, LOCAL OFFICIALS AND YOUNGSTERS ON HAND CUT THE RIBBON.

and clean air." Lewis Ledford, state parks director, said, "This benchmark in the development of the park is the result of deliberate planning and careful stewardship of a very fragile mountain ecosystem. It's fitting that the facility offer cutting-edge, sustainable building features."

The state parks system has increased its commitment to sustainability by seeking certification for all large projects by the national Leadership

in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Features at the Gorges State Park visitor center that will contribute to certification include both active and passive solar energy systems, geothermal energy systems, rainwater collection and water-saving fixtures and natural landscaping. The structure was designed by Pearce, Brinkly, Cease and Lee PA of Asheville, and general contractor was Cooper Construction Co. of Hendersonville.



STATE PARKS COLOR GUARD RAISES THE FLAGS DURING THE DEDICATION.

MST ROUTE

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"We think that will attract additional outdoor tourists from across the country, giving an economic boost to communities and counties along the trail."

The 1,000-mile, cross-state project has often been described as a connect-the-dots exercise, with efforts to create a true trail experience between public lands that include state parks and federal forests and parklands. To date, more than half the route has been designated as such with back roads acting as links.

In the northern piedmont, Stone Mountain, Pilot Mountain and Hanging Rock state parks are the obvious dots of the route from the mountains to the Triad.

The Sauratown Trails Association (with Friends of the Sauratown Mountains) has worked for decades to create and maintain the Sauratown Trail from Pilot Mountain to Hanging Rock, depending on the good graces of private landowners willing to grant easements for footpath.

Meanwhile, on the western side of Pilot Mountain, the younger Elkin Valley Trail Association has worked to devise a backroad route for that link and is searching for footpath opportunities.

Spur trails connecting the main route to



PILOT MOUNTAIN SUPERINTENDENT MATT WINDSOR ADDRESSES MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA STATE TRAIL GROUP. the towns of Pilot Mountain and Danbury are another goal that would broaden the trail's appeal and boost ecotourism.

Lewis Ledford, state parks director, told the gathering of volunteers that such advocacy is considered truly a bipartisan effort in North Carolina with its strong links between conservation, tourism and economic development. The Mountains-to-Sea State Trail is a symbol of unity, he said. "It's about citizens such as yourselves. It's about you as volunteers and the important work you do."

SKVARLA

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Skvarla, of Pinehurst, comes to DENR after a successful career in business. He most recently served as chief operating officer for Restoration Systems, an environmental mitigation firm.

An attorney, Skvarla has also served as chief operating officer for The Aviation Group Inc., an all-cargo airline, as managing director of an investment banking office in Raleigh and as owner of a Sandhills golf course community.

Skvarla outlined three guiding principles in a mission statement to department employees. In addition to better customer service, he said the agency should be aware of the economic costs and benefits integral to its mission, and should make decisions concerning the environment with a respect and understanding for a diverse set of scientific viewpoints.

To help execute the new mission, Skvarla said DENR's new leadership team will be:

-Brad Ives as assistant secretary for natural resources (to include direction of the Division

of Parks and Recreation). Ives is currently vice president of corporate development at Semprius, a manufacturer of solar panels.

-Former State Rep. Mitch Gillespie as assistant secretary for the environment. He has also served as chairman of the Environmental Review Commission.

-Neal Robbins as director of legislative and intergovernmental affairs. Robbins has been an attorney with Robbins Law in Winston-Salem.

-Lacy Presnell as general counsel. As an attorney with Burns, Day & Presnell in Raleigh, he has extensive civil trial and appellate court experience.

- Mary Penny Thompson as acting assistant secretary for administration. Thompson has served as DENR's chief deputy secretary, the department's general counsel and assistant secretary for information systems.

Additional information about administrative changes will be available on division and department social media outlets.

STATE PARKS MOBILE APP IMPROVED

The NC State Parks “Pocket Ranger” mobile app for iPhones and Android smartphones was already a pretty good bargain. It’s free, and includes all the information that’s on the state parks website about each park and recreation area, including detailed maps and campground maps.

But one of the advantages of smartphone applications is that they’re regularly upgraded by the developers. Over time, they get even better and become a better bargain.

The division’s partner with the state parks app, ParksByNature, has always been aggressive in devising upgrades and they’ve just released a few welcome improvements.

The app’s GIS-based maps that can be downloaded before visitors come to a park now include trail information for most of the North Carolina State Parks. Now, visitors using the app can get their bearings on where they are in the park in relation to the trail network.

It’s fun to navigate a hike this way, mark waypoints and create a photo tour of the experience. But, there’s also an obvious safety factor in having real-time information about precise locations on the trail with GPS coordinates.

Safety is also at the heart of another improvement. Each park’s “main page” in the app now sports a distinctive “Park Alerts” link. This is information visitors need to know regarding temporary closures and emergencies or any situation likely to affect the visit.

For instance, if a campground loop must be closed because of downed trees, an alert can be posted immediately. In coming months, this alert system will be combined with the improved use of “push notifications” to automatically alert park visitors of significant emergency events, such as



hurricanes, that can close parks on short notice.

Another improvement is all about fun (and education). Planning the ultimate state park adventure is now easier and faster with the app’s Events Calendar. It tells park visitors of all upcoming events at each park, such as interpretive programs, ranger-led hikes and festivals.

In real time, the app’s calendar is synched to that of the state parks system’s website. Visitors get the latest event information and last-minute changes.

If you own a smartphone, there are more reasons than ever to add the Pocket Ranger app. You can find it in Apple’s App Store and in the Android Market by searching “Pocket Ranger.”

A portion of the revenue generated by the mobile app returns to the state parks via the statewide Friends of State Parks.

DAY CAMPS FOR KIDS

HAW RIVER STATE PARK CONDUCTED THREE DAY CAMPS AND TWO GRAND CAMP SESSIONS THIS YEAR. ALSO, AN OVERNIGHT CAMP FOR AT-RISK TEENAGE GIRLS WAS HELD AT WILLIAM B. UMSTEAD STATE PARK, AND THE SOCIETY FOR HISPANIC PROFESSIONALS PARTNERED IN A SCIENCE ENRICHMENT CAMP FOR 25 MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS. HERE, A REPTILE NEST IS EXAMINED AT A HAW RIVER EVENT.



FIVE RANGERS RECEIVE COMMISSIONS

Five new state park rangers received commissions as law enforcement officers in August. The rangers were sworn in by Superior Court Judge Michael R. Morgan at a special ceremony in the state parks system’s new headquarters in the Nature Research Center in Raleigh.

Receiving a commission as a Special Peace Officer at the end of 17-week basic law enforcement training is generally regarded as the last formal step before a ranger takes on full duties in a unit of the state parks system. During the training period prior to commissioning, a ranger is assimilated into the park and begins assuming duties in resource management and visitor service.

“It requires a lot of dedication and training for our candidates to earn the right to wear the campaign-style hat of a state park ranger,” said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. “These men and women are true multi-specialists who are frequently asked to assume many roles during a day at



RANGERS ARE SWORN AT THE NRC HEADQUARTERS FOR THE FIRST TIME.

work from finding a lost hiker to giving an interpretive program to dealing with violations of state law”

Ledford also noted that rangers, beyond their role as stewards of natural resources, are part of a “thin green line” of conservation and safety in the outdoors, and that six rangers in the United States died in the line of service last year.

Judge Morgan told the newly sworn rangers that their position is a “curious combination”

of law enforcement and friendly assistance. “You are ambassadors not only for the park to which you’re assigned, but for all the parks. You embody all of that in your uniform and personality.

State park rangers are required to have at least a two-year degree, and many come to the job with four-year university degrees in curricula related to resource and/or park management. Beyond law enforcement training, all are trained in medical first response, search-and-rescue, wildfire suppression, natural resource management, interpretive skills and environmental education.

The rangers who received commissions are: Emily Brooke Abernathy at Falls Lake State Recreation Area; Erin Elizabeth Bradford at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area; James Bradford Cameron at Lake James State Park; Andrew Morgan Edwards at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area; and, Vincent David Morgan at Mount Mitchell State Park.



RAVEN ROCK BRIDGE

MAINTENANCE MECHANICS AT RAVEN ROCK STATE PARK AND CARVERS CREEK STATE PARK COMBINED TO COMPLETE THIS NEW BRIDGE ACROSS LITTLE CREEK HEADING TO THE GROUP CAMPSITES.

McELHONE SUPERINTENDENT IN WEST

Sean McElhone, formerly the superintendent at Lake James State Park, has been promoted to west district superintendent for the state parks system. He succeeds Tom Jackson, who retired in September after a 27-year career.

As one of four district superintendents, McElhone will be responsible for operations, resource management, environmental education programming, law enforcement, safety and facility maintenance for 11 state parks and seven state natural areas in western North Carolina.

"Sean has done an outstanding job directing the development of Lake James State Park, which was expanded by more than 3,000 acres," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

"His administrative abilities and practical experience at five established state parks will be invaluable as we develop other new state parks in the west, including those at Chimney Rock, Grandfather Mountain and Elk Knob.

McElhone has served as superintendent

at Lake James in Burke and McDowell counties since 2007. A native of Pittsburgh, Pa., he earned an associate degree in forest technology and a bachelor's degree in recreation and parks management, both from Penn State University in 2000.

McElhone was an intern at Mount Mitchell State Park, before joining the state parks system in 2000 as a ranger at Hammocks Beach State Park.

He was a senior ranger at Jones Lake State Park and in 2006, was named superintendent at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.

He is a certified environmental educator.



COOK NORTH DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

Dave Cook, formerly the superintendent at Hanging Rock State Park, has been promoted to north district superintendent for the state parks system. He succeeds Erik Nygard, who retired in October after a 28-year career.

As one of four district superintendents, Cook will be responsible for operations, resource management, environmental education programming, law enforcement, safety and facility maintenance for nine state parks across northern North Carolina as well as Occoneechee State Natural Area.

"Dave is an experienced veteran of the state parks system, having served as superintendent or ranger at four state parks and as a leader in our search-and-rescue and emergency response efforts," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "He is highly qualified for the range of challenges that a district superintendent encounters in a growing state parks system."

Cook has served as Hanging Rock State Park's superintendent since 2008. A native of

Chapel Hill, he graduated from North Carolina State University in 1982 with a bachelor's degree in recreation resources administration.

He was a district executive with Boy Scouts of America for three years before joining the state parks system in 1986 as a park ranger at Falls Lake State Recreation Area.

Cook served as a ranger at Morrow Mountain State Park before being named superintendent at Eno River State Park in 1993. He is a certified environmental educator, holds advanced law enforcement certification and is an instructor for the division in search and rescue techniques and law enforcement physical fitness.



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NC STATE PARKS



JACKSON RETIRES FROM WEST DISTRICT

Tom Jackson, who capped a 27-year career in public service as west district superintendent, retired from the state parks system in September. Jackson, who also served as a ranger, superintendent and chief ranger, was described as a "consummate park professional" at a retirement luncheon in his honor.

"Tom has never forgotten what it's like to be a ranger," said Mike Lambert, chief of operations. "And, he would always express concern first for his staff."

A graduate of Knoxville High School and Appalachian State University, Jackson began his career at Hanging Rock State Park in 1985.

After stints as a Mecklenburg County park ranger and Biltmore Forest public safety officer, he returned to Hanging Rock in 1991.

He served as a ranger at Jordan Lake and park superintendent at Falls Lake before



JACKSON SAYS A FINAL FEW WORDS TO HIS STATE PARK COLLEAGUES.

being named chief ranger in 2000 responsible for law enforcement and training across the system.

He was named west district superintendent in 2005, supervising 11 state parks and seven state natural areas. During his tenure, parks at Chimney Rock, Elk Knob and Grandfather Mountain were created.

In 1992, Jackson was honored with a Special Achieve-

ment Award for developing volunteer and campground host programs, and he was given special recognition in 1994 for arranging specialized training at Jordan Lake.

Lewis Ledford, state parks director, noted that Jackson repeatedly impressed supervisors, with one describing him as "exceptionally motivated, highly skilled and always capable."

NYGARD RETIRES AFTER 28-YEAR CAREER

Erik Nygard retired at the end of October, ending a 28-year career with the state parks system as a ranger, education specialist, park superintendent and north district superintendent.

Nygard was honored at a retirement event at a community center just outside the gates of Eno River State Park where he began as a seasonal employee and then as a ranger in 1982.

"State parks make life better and Erik made the parks better," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



DEPUTY DIRECTOR CAROL TINGLEY PRESENTS ERIK NYGARD WITH ONE OF SEVERAL GOVERNMENT RETIREMENT CERTIFICATES.

NEW FISHING PIER GRACES LAKE JAMES

It's unclear whether the bass and panfish would agree, but anglers coming to Lake James State Park have something to cheer about – a new, fully-accessible fishing pier which opened this fall at the park's new Paddy's Creek Area.

The 60-foot-long structure was a joint effort of the state parks system and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and provides much-needed pedestrian fishing access on the Burke County side of the 6,812-acre lake.

"This is an excellent example of two state agencies working together to provide a new recreation opportunity for people in North Carolina during a challenging time of funding shortfalls," said West District Superintendent Sean McElhone. "The wildlife agency came to us with the materials and manpower to put in this handicapped accessible fishing pier. To us, it was a no-brainer."

The state park opened its new Paddy's Creek Area in September 2010, which initially included a large swim beach, bathhouse and picnic areas. It marked the initial development

on a 3,000-acre tract purchased from Crescent Resources Inc. in 2004.

The access area on the lake's north shore is becoming the epicenter for the only public park at the reservoir. The new pier is just west of the bathhouse and near a new trailhead.

Planning for the project began about three years ago.

NYGARD CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

A Durham native and graduate of Northern Durham High School, Nygard earned a bachelor's degree in forest management from North Carolina State University in 1982. He earned a spot on Eno River's roster without telling his mother. An ardent environmentalist, Margaret Nygard was a driving force in the establishment of the state park in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

After jobs as a ranger at Pilot Mountain State Park and east district interpretation and education specialist, Nygard began a two-year tour with the Peace Corps in 1990 as a community forester in Nepal, training foresters and working with grassroots forest user groups.

The wildlife agency's Division of Inland Fisheries was instrumental in launching the idea, using funds from the federal Sport Fish Restoration Act.

The structure was actually built in sections and floated into place by park maintenance mechanics, rangers and Wildlife Resources Commission staff.

He returned to Eno River in 1996 and joined the ranger staff at William B. Umstead State Park in 1998 before being named superintendent of Hanging Rock State Park in 2003. He was promoted to north district superintendent in 2008.

In 2006, he was presented a Safety and Heroism Award from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources for reviving a 14-year-old who had collapsed at Hanging Rock. Nygard won admiration from a number of park visitors, one of them writing to parks system administrators, "His performance affirmed our admiration for North Carolina state park rangers."

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

NOVEMBER, 2012

NC STATE PARK	November 2012	TOTAL YTD Nov-12	November 2011	TOTAL YTD Nov-11	% CHANGE (2012/2011) Nov YTD
Carolina Beach State Park	27,740	527,730	34,868	503,110	-20% 5%
Carvers Creek State Park	0	126	0	10	-100% 1,160%
Chimney Rock State Park	19,233	217,227	12,036	162,632	60% 34%
Cliffs of the Neuse State Park	10,348	171,155	11,788	159,401	-12% 7%
Crowders Mountain State Park	26,119	303,141	23,101	343,168	13% -12%
Dismal Swamp State Park	10,812	83,492	6,909	73,630	56% 13%
Elk Knob State Park	1,662	31,251	2,209	32,969	-25% -5%
Eno River State Park including Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area	35,222	466,242	37,256	459,415	-5% 1%
Falls Lake State Recreation Area	20,513	909,057	64,243	844,874	-68% 8%
Fort Fisher State Recreation Area	23,331	765,735	26,350	790,036	-11% -3%
Fort Macon State Park	53,644	1,197,632	61,402	1,254,126	-13% -5%
Goose Creek State Park	26,066	378,128	18,162	238,079	44% 59%
Gorges State Park	6,536	107,292	6,189	86,741	6% 24%
Grandfather Mountain State Park	5,780	75,002	5,019	47,390	15% 58%
Hammocks Beach State Park	4,999	123,417	4,148	78,124	21% 58%
Haw River State Park	2,334	30,203	2,069	22,589	13% 34%
Hanging Rock State Park	25,322	431,203	29,211	496,806	-13% -13%
Jones Lake State Park	4,382	117,245	4,846	51,113	-10% 129%
Jordan Lake State Recreation Area	43,347	1,147,445	25,596	852,617	69% 35%
Jockey's Ridge State Park	28,056	916,974	49,939	1,291,934	-44% -29%
Kerr Lake State Recreation Area	37,192	1,085,835	40,688	1,209,272	-9% -10%
Lake James State Park	15,016	378,287	23,593	544,238	-36% -30%
Lake Norman State Park	28,497	500,679	32,487	476,844	-12% 5%
Lake Waccamaw State Park	6,361	126,746	4,792	81,896	33% 55%
Lumber River State Park	3,612	51,451	4,596	59,568	-21% -14%
Mayo River State Park	1,086	23,185	2,675	32,824	-59% -29%
Merchants Millpond State Park	20,007	264,987	18,057	248,442	11% 7%
Medoc Mountain State Park	7,590	97,252	8,438	77,756	-10% 25%
Mount Mitchell State Park	6,732	297,820	10,955	300,691	-39% -1%
Morrow Mountain State Park	23,350	358,184	28,040	435,239	-17% -18%
New River State Park including Mount Jefferson State Natural Area	12,044	274,278	13,170	309,444	-9% -11%
Pettigrew State Park	4,399	64,461	4,576	63,568	-4% 1%
Pilot Mountain State Park	22,353	421,223	25,666	410,244	-13% 3%
Raven Rock State Park	19,987	182,454	14,768	142,746	35% 28%
Singletary Lake State Park	1,236	20,086	263	22,417	370% -10%
South Mountains State Park	12,242	186,948	12,542	186,246	-2% 0%
Stone Mountain State Park	22,364	348,726	20,860	429,200	7% -19%
Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve	4,636	51,164	4,807	54,015	-4% -5%
William B. Umstead State Park	84,285	1,523,278	72,875	839,644	16% 81%
SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL	708,435	14,256,741	769,189	13,713,058	-8% 4%

'PARK' IT

WITH A STATE PARKS
SPECIALTY LICENSE TAG



The Division of Motor Vehicles is accepting applications and payment for these special license plates. There is a \$30 fee in addition to regular license fees (\$60 for personalized plates). Additional fees support conservation through the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds.

Information at www.ncparks.gov
or www.ncdot.org/dmv



Our Mission Remains...

to protect North Carolina's **natural diversity**;
to provide and promote **outdoor recreation**
opportunities throughout North Carolina;
to exemplify and encourage **good stewardship**
of North Carolina's natural resources for all
citizens and visitors.

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SAFETY ZONE

SAFETY MATTERS ON THE LADDERS

- ✓ Do not underestimate the danger of falling; falls are a leading cause of accidental injuries both on and off the job.
- ✓ To reach high objects, use a ladder or step stool - never a box or chair.
- ✓ Follow the 4-to-1 rule when using a straight ladder; place its base out at least 1/4 of its height.
- ✓ Always face the ladder when climbing and descending; carry loads in one hand, keeping the other on the ladder.

The Steward
NC Division of Parks and Recreation
Public Information Office
1615 MSC
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615

